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Ministry of Forests

MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE ACTION PLAN RELEASED

PRINCE GEORGE – A wide-ranging strategic action plan to respond to the largest mountain pine beetle infestation in the province's history has been released by the British Columbia government.

"On June 25 in Prince George, our government committed to work aggressively in developing a comprehensive action plan to battle the pine beetle epidemic," Forests Minister Michael de Jong said today in Prince George. "This forest health emergency threatens the jobs and livelihoods of communities all across the North and Interior. As such we are implementing strong measures to protect our forests and the jobs they sustain.

"This plan is the result of extensive consultations with workers, community leaders, First Nations and industry representatives," de Jong said. "It incorporates recommendations from the government caucus task force, R&S Rogers Consulting and the industry emergency task force. The industry has worked tirelessly for two years to ensure this issue is addressed."

The plan includes these key actions:

1. Appoint a beetle management co-ordinator who will report directly to the minister of forests.

2. Establish emergency management zones that will allow faster harvesting of infested timber. 3. Extend the 'waterbed' exemption until a new market-based pricing regime is in place.

4. Protect communities through transferring cutting rights across timber supply areas, co-ordinating fire protection action, streamlining administration and increasing cut control flexibility.

5. Improve transportation infrastructure, including improved access into infested areas.

6. Pursue federal contribution for emergency funding.

De Jong also announced that Ray Schultz, regional manager for the Prince George forest region, has been appointed beetle management co-ordinator to oversee the west-central British Columbia mountain pine beetle action plan. He will be relieved of his other duties. Schultz will co-ordinate cross-agency liaison and ensure the most effective courses of action are identified and delivered.

"This plan will allow us to act quickly to protect jobs in communities across the region and, at the same time, protect our economic principles and the overall health of our forests," said Schultz. "At every step along the way, I will work with local agencies to ensure beetle management strategies are integrated into existing land and resource management plans."

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De Jong emphasized that this action plan is designed to make every effort to reduce the spread of the infestation, recognizing that eradication depends on two successive winters with temperatures below -30 degrees Celsius.

The mountain pine beetle infestation has spread over the past several years as a result of mild weather and an abundance of mature lodgepole pine, the predominant species of commercially harvested timber in the province. The pine beetle has infested more than 600,000 hectares within an area of 5.7 million hectares (twice the size of Vancouver Island). About $4.2-billion worth of timber in British Columbia has been infested, threatening the future stability of up to 30 communities.

The mountain pine beetle is the most common species of bark beetle. The province is also facing problems due to spruce beetles and Douglas fir beetles. Bark beetles burrow into the bark of mature trees, cutting off their water flow and eventually killing them.

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Editors: The Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan is available on the Ministry of Forests Web site at http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/PAB/News/Features/beetles/index.htm.

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